A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT

The Funeral

OF THE

REV. ARÆTIUS B. HULL,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WORCESTER,

MAY, 1826.

BY JOHN NELSON,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN LEICESTER.

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SERMON.

1 *CORINTHIANS* vii. 31.

FOR THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD PASSETH AWAY.

GOD *only* is immutable. There is no created object through the wide range of nature, on which we can fix our eye and say, this is *the same yesterday, to-day and forever.* Yet, transitory as the scene certainly is with which we are now connected, we cling to it with an intenseness and ardour of attachment, which often renders us incapable of pursuing our higher destinies, or of transferring our affections from earth to heaven. In consequence of the change which sin has wrought in us, we are apt to regard our present habitation, not as the mirror, in which we are to contemplate the Creator's glory, nor the medium through which the thoughts and desires of a rational being are to ascend to his throne in the heavens; but as the scene merely of our own gratification.

It is our common sin, that we love the world too well—that we give to it that place in our hearts which belongs only to God, and that we so eagerly pursue its fascinating objects as to forget or neglect the interests of the immortal soul. In seasons of prosperity, especially, when all things are smiling around us, and when we are borne along on the tide of success, as we fondly believe, to still higher attainments of earthly good, how truly does the *heart* say, whatever may be the language of the *lips*, Give us the world, and we desire no other heaven. And, strange to tell, when lost, as we sometimes are, in the giddy mazes of business or of pleasure, when the spirit within us becomes secularized by its connexion with secular things, when the affections of the soul flow in earthly channels, becoming more and more contaminated by the impurities of the element through which they pass, we gain the impression, so treacherous are these false hearts, that here is our final home, and we say to ourselves, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease—eat, drink, and be merry.*

It is needful that this false charm should be broken. It is well, it is a token of mercy, not only when the word, but when the providence of God, sends home the affecting lesson that *the fashion of this world passeth away.*

The fashion of this world passeth away.—Yes, all that is great, all that is magnificent, all that is useful, all that is endearing, *passeth away.* God hath so decreed it, and *who shall stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

Even the fabric of nature, that immense system of things of which we ourselves compose a part, beautiful and magnificent as it is, was not designed to abide forever. So far from this, change and mutability are inscribed on every feature; and revolution is here to succeed revolution, till the purposes of infinite wisdom shall be fully accomplished. Then, whatever is material shall be destroyed—then, nothing shall remain of this fair creation, but those immortal spirits which once dwelt in habitations of clay. At the winding up of the great drama, the lights of heaven shall be blotted out, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth shall be stricken from her foundation, and nature and time shall be no more. *They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

And, as the frame of nature is ere long to be dissolved, so all her operations, as they pass in review before us, exhibit perpetual vicissitude. *One generation passeth away, and another generation*

cometh: the sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down and hasteneth to the place whence he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about toward the north. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; and unto the place whence the rivers came, thither they return again. Day and night, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter succeed each other in continued succession. One fashion of nature gives place to another, and that to another still; so that none abide, but all are passing away.

In the history of mankind, there are still more striking vicissitudes. One empire after another has arisen, had its day of glory, and then sunk to rise no more. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, each in turn held the world in bondage; but what and where are they now? Succeeding empires have experienced the same fate. The sceptre of power has passed from one to another, in quick succession. The nation which but yesterday held a proud sway over the destinies of men, to-day is a supplicant at the feet of some new conqueror.

And, amid the revolutions of empire, we cannot but notice the mutability and decay that have attended all the monuments of art. How many cities, towns and palaces, which commanded the admiration of mankind, and seemed to bid defiance to the assaults of time, are now so

entirely swept away that the place where they stood cannot be found. The traveller wanders in vain, on the banks of the Euphrates, amid the howlings of wild beasts, the screams of the bittern and the owl, and the terrors of venomous reptiles, to find the site of ancient Babylon.—Other cities, too, once famed for their walls, their temples, and their bulwarks, are utterly passed away from the knowledge and memory of man.

In the mean time, the changes of human opinion—of schemes of philosophy and religion—of forms of government—of laws, customs and manners,—afford a striking illustration of the truth before us. Many of these systems, which in one age have been held sacred and venerable, in another have been exploded; nor were the systems then introduced more permanent in their duration. Change has followed change, so that it has been the principal business of the historian to record the fluctuations of human opinion, and to hold up to view the ever varying features of society.

But the declaration that *the fashion of this world passeth away* will, perhaps, more deeply impress us, if we bring it to the test of our own experience. Our lives are made up of changes. We pass in quick succession from youth to manhood, and from manhood to the weaknesses and infirmities of old age; and, during the whole prog-

ress, how frequent are the alternations from sorrow to joy, and from joy to sorrow! Into how many new situations are we brought by the providence of God! How many unexpected scenes open on our view!

If we look around us, we see the same changes in the condition of others. The proud are abased, and the lowly exalted—the rich are made poor, and the poor become rich—the prosperous are overwhelmed with calamity, and the wretched sing for joy. In the mean time, the men of wisdom and of skill, the distinguished actors on life's busy stage, are passing away to the congregation of the dead. A new generation rises up, to occupy their places for a few days, and then another comes, and another still, in endless succession. And the ravages of mortality are without order and without discrimination. Those who occupy the highest stations, and who are the most distinguished for their talents and learning, their piety and usefulness—the able statesman, the good ruler, the learned professor, the faithful missionary, and the pious minister, are called like others from this busy stage, and often at the very time when their services seem the most needful to society. Thus, even that which has the highest value in the fashion of this world is continually passing away.

Yes—and we ourselves are passing away.—This is not our abiding place. The mortality of our friends admonishes us that we too are mortal—that these frail bodies shall return to the dust, and that our name and memory shall be forgotten.

The melancholy event which has brought us together, furnishes a most affecting memento that the things of this world are fading, transitory, evanescent.

Beneath that shroud are the remains of one, who, but recently, was a distinguished actor on the stage of life. He was a husband and a father, a man of science and of refined education, a minister of Jesus Christ and an example of no ordinary virtue. But, behold the change! All now is passed and gone, except a cherished memory. That body is fast returning to the element from whence it came; and that immortal spirit, which for a short time lived and reigned within, has gone, we trust, to its everlasting rest.

Surely, amid the solemnities of this occasion, and in view of these emblems of mortality, we must *all* feel that *the fashion of this world is passing away.*

But let us remember, that though all material things are destined to change and dissolution—though empires fall to rise no more—though di-

adems crumble in the dust—though riches take to themselves wings, and fly away—though generation after generation go down to the silence and forgetfulness of the grave—though, finally, the hand of destruction shall sweep away forever this earth and these heavens,—the soul is immortal: *that* shall survive, not merely the decay of its earthly habitation, but "the wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds." And if, as the gospel assures us, the Son of God came from heaven to earth, that he might redeem it from death, that he might pour upon it the light of salvation, that he might open to its view the prospect of joys unfading and eternal, surely it is madness to waste its noblest energies in the pursuit of that world the fashion of which is so rapidly passing away.

I turn to the melancholy occasion which has now called us together.

The death of any one is a solemn event. The death of a Minister is peculiarly solemn.—The flock mourns, if the Shepherd be taken from them. Society at large participates in the bereavement, if the wise, the pious and the good are removed from their useful labours.

The very limited time I have had for preparation, if there were no other cause of failure, will, I fear, prevent my doing justice to the memory of our much loved and much lamented friend.

I shall not attempt a formal eulogium of his character. But it is due to the grace of God which made him what he was—it is due to living friends, who may profit by the example of departed worth, to present some outlines of his uncommonly excellent life.

The Rev. Arætius B. Hull was born in Woodbridge, (Conn.) October 12, 1788, and was descended from a respectable family, which emigrated from the vicinity of Liverpool, (England,) to New-Haven, in the early settlement of that town. He pursued his studies, preparatory to his admission into college, with the Rev. Dr. Ely, and entered Yale College in 1803, at the age of fifteen.

During his collegiate course, he had to struggle with ill health as well as pecuniary embarrassments: yet he maintained an honourable standing, and secured to an uncommon degree the confidence and affection of his class-mates. He was graduated in 1807, with distinguished reputation. Immediately after leaving college, he engaged in the instruction of the Academy in Weathersfield, but soon went to the south, for the benefit of his health.

In 1810, he was appointed a Tutor in Yale College, which office he successfully filled for the term of six years. In October, 1816, soon after leaving the tutorship, he was licensed to

preach the gospel. Still suffering from ill health, he preached, occasionally, in different places, one of which was Brookfield, (Conn.)

On the 23d of May, 1821, he was ordained as Minister over the First Church and Society in Worcester, and continued to sustain the labours of his office, without much interruption, till May 1, 1825.

The seeds of disease were early planted in his constitution. When five years old, he had the small-pox to a degree that few have survived; and it is probable that he never fully recovered from the effects of this malady. During his collegiate life, pecuniary embarrassment and hard study made further inroads on his naturally feeble constitution. His first attack of the fatal disease, which has finally terminated his life, was during his senior year in college. It was often repeated, and sometimes threatened a speedy termination of his earthly existence.

All, who had the happiness of an acquaintance with Mr. Hull, will agree that he possessed a mind of a very high order, and that mind was enriched with uncommon attainments of general as well as professional knowledge. His conceptions were clear, just, and discriminating. At the same time, a highly cultivated taste, a refinement of thought and of feeling, as pleasing as it

was genuine, pervaded all his writings and all his conversation.

His discourses in public were sound, learned, and uncommonly instructive. If Providence had continued to him health, few, I apprehend, would have surpassed him as a preacher.

His manners in private life were such as result from strong attachments, eminently fine feelings, and the utmost delicacy of taste, controlled and influenced by the power of religion. His deportment was simple and unostentatious, yet marked by that urbanity which always gave a charm to his conversation, and rendered his society irresistibly attractive.

What is far more important, certainly, to one whose soul has taken its flight to other worlds, he was, we have reason to believe, in the true and legitimate sense of the term, a good man, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Judging from the fruit which he brought forth, religion was the basis of his character, and the all-pervading spirit of his life. Hence, when ministering at her altars, and when moving in other spheres of usefulness, he laboured indefatigably to give extension and influence to those sacred truths which lay at the foundation of his own hopes, and which he believed to be necessary to the present and eternal happiness of his fellow-men.

When about eight years old, his mind was seriously impressed with religious subjects. So tender was his conscience, that through the whole term of his subsequent youth he was kept in a great measure from those sins and follies which are incident to that period of life. Though he did not make a public profession of religion till 1812, it was his own belief, that if ever he became truly reconciled to God, it was in his childhood.

Of his benevolence, prayerfulness, fidelity in duty, and uncommonly Christian deportment, during the course of his public ministry, I need not speak; for his life has been a living epistle, known and read of all men.

The state of his mind, during his last sickness, and through the closing scene of his mortal pilgrimage, was such as becomes the disciple of Jesus Christ.

In the early part of winter, when first confined to his room, he experienced some distressing doubts in regard to his acceptance with God. He feared, to use his own expression, that he should "be left to the triumphs of the adversary." But peace was soon restored to his mind; and he has uniformly, from that period, indulged a firm and unshaken hope in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ. Often would he say, with

a glow of feeling never to be forgotten, *I know in whom I have believed—he will not leave me.* Often did he say to the friends who visited him, "I am happy in the prospect of death." "For your sake and the children's," he said to his afflicted companion, "if it may be the will of God, I should like to recover; but I trust that, through grace, my submission is perfect."

It was a matter of joy to him, that he had been permitted, even for a limited time, to preach the gospel, and to preach those doctrines which, in the near prospect of eternity, were his only consolation and hope.

Just before his death, he said to some friends, when speaking of the confidence he had in God, and of the joys he then experienced, "I would thus speak to all my people, if it were possible. You must be my witnesses." Thus, his last end was tranquil and happy—his sun went down in peace.

With him, the Jordan of death is passed, the conflicts of mortality are ended. His immortal spirit, long the tenant of a frail and sickly body, has gone, we believe, to its final and everlasting rest.—*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.*

The Widow and the fatherless Children of our departed friend claim our tenderest sympathies.

You, dear Madam, are left lonely and desolate by the providence of God. *Lover and friend are put far from you.* Oh, if our tears could repair the breach! but no, it is our duty to submit. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away*—can you not add, *blessed be his name?*—Can you not say, in the language of the agonizing Saviour, *the cup which my heavenly Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?* Thankful, I am sure you must feel, even in this hour of affliction, that it was your lot to be united with such a man, and that you have been spared to cherish his sickly frame, to soothe the last hours of his mortal pilgrimage, and to participate so largely in the benefit of his prayers and pious example.

Dear Madam, we commend you, and those loved offspring, yet so young as to need a father's care, to that Almighty Being, who has declared that he will be the widow's God, and the protector of the fatherless. May you and they be guided by his wisdom. May the darkness of the present scene be illuminated by the light of his countenance. May his hand lead you, and his grace be sufficient for you—and when you and they shall be summoned away from this world of sin, of disappointment, and of death, may you be prepared, by divine grace, to join that husbnad and that father, whose untimely

death you now deplore, in that happier world, where *all tears shall be wiped away.*

The Brother and Sister (I might almost say children) of the deceased, for to them he was as a father, will learn from this dark and afflicting scene how uncertain, how transitory is all earthly good. You will not, I hope, soon forget the good counsel and the pious example of your departed brother. Whatever may be your lot in life, let *his* God be *your* God. Like him, make the religion of Jesus Christ your early choice; and like him you shall be sustained by it amid all the darkness, and trials, and conflicts which may here await you. While we sympathize in your sorrows, and pray for your consolation, we point you to the gospel, as an all-sufficient guide through the wilderness of this world to the Canaan of rest.

This Church and People mourn the untimely death of their much-loved Minister. For a few short years, brethren, he occupied this sacred desk. Here he dispensed the word of life, and led in your devotions. Upon this table he administered the sacrament of the supper, and before this altar he baptized your children.

In the mean time, he was often present in the family circle—in the school—by the bed of sickness—and at funeral solemnities, imparting the

instructions and consolations of the gospel, as circumstances required. Nor can it be doubted that by these various services an important influence was exerted on the present and eternal destinies of many of this people. Some, I trust, will acknowledge him in the day of judgment as their spiritual father, and ascribe their conversion, under God, to the power of those truths and persuasions of the gospel which flowed from his lips. And may we not hope, that in the mean time much good seed has been sown, which shall hereafter spring up, and bear fruit unto everlasting life? But that ministry is now closed forever. *He* has gone to give an account how he has preached, and *you* must soon go to give an account how you have heard.

It must give you much consolation, brethren, in this sad hour, that you ever rendered to your departed Minister and friend undivided affection, and that you treated him with a kindness and liberality which soothed his last hours, and raised his heart in thankfulness to God on your account. Such kindness and liberality to the husband and father will not be withdrawn from the widow and children.

Your bereavement, brethren, will insure our sympathies, our prayers, and our kindest assistance. Let not the darkness of the present dispensation discourage you. Remember that He,

who by a mysterious providence has deprived you of one Minister, can raise you up another, to break to you the bread of life, to preserve you in harmony, and to strengthen and guide you, by the instructions of the gospel, in the way of life.

The Brethren in the Ministry, and particularly the Association of which our departed friend was a member and an ornament, most deeply participate in the sorrows of this occasion.

That dear companion and fellow-labourer, with whom we took such sweet counsel, whose judgment and taste we so much respected, whom we ever listened to with undivided attention, and whose heart flowed forth in so much kindness to us all, has left our circle forever. Long and tenderly shall we cherish his memory. May the solemn and most affecting event of his death admonish us effectually that the time is short, that God will soon call us to give up the account of our stewardship, and to receive our reward according to our works.

May God teach us all, by this solemn providence, so to *number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;* and may he give us grace, that we may become *followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*